

IRISH SNAKES, WILD CATS AND OTHER MYSTERY ANIMALS
RICHARD MUIRHEAD

When someone mentions the cryptids of Ireland one immediately thinks of lake monsters, ABCs (Alien Big Cats) and the now well documented Master Otter, the Dobharchú. But there are frequent variations on these themes. The more obscure cryptids are more interesting. By “obscure” I mean, “not well known; not famous” (Agnes 1999).

The further back in time one goes the more mythological or supernatural Ireland’s mystery animals seem to become. For example: “A fearful monster is described in a Irish tale as having been seen by Fionn and his heroes when hunting in Glen Smol; ‘it was being chased by a red wife (bean ruadh), had four thin legs, a head like a bear (? cullaigh), and long horns on it, the rest of it like a deer (eilit), with a shining moon on each side; the sea was as easy for it as the land, and no one could overtake it, but Bran got up with it as it fell dead.’ This beast-monster was no less than the King of the Fir Bolg in that shape” (Forbes 1905).

Also there were the Man-Wolves of Ossory (Joyce 1911):

“In the dim days of yore, the people of the kingdom of Ossory had the power of changing themselves into wolves whenever they pleased. During the whole time an Ossorian lived as a wolf, his own proper body remained at home as if he were dead: and when about to make a wolf of himself he gave strict orders to his friends not to disturb the body; for if it were removed he was never able to regain his own shape, but was doomed to remain a wolf for the rest of his natural life.

“While he was in his wolf-shape he ravaged sheep-folds and devoured cattle, and was in every respect as fierce and bloodthirsty as any natural-born wolf. And if you came on him suddenly and attacked him in the act of eating a sheep, he commonly ran straight home and resumed his own shape. But although he was now, when you confronted him, a man, and looked as innocent as a lamb, yet if you insisted on examining him closely, you found on him all the marks and tokens of his savage feast:—splashes of blood here and there, and bits of raw flesh in his teeth; and the wounds you inflicted on the wolf, you found them fresh and bleeding on the corresponding parts of the man’s body.” . . .

“Giraldus also reminds us that in his own day there were many old women in Scotland and Wales, as well as in Ireland, who were in the habit of turning themselves into hares and running about the country at night sucking the teats of cows. And here we are forced to acknowledge that he is corroborated by several Irish story-tellers of much later times, down even to the present day, who relate many curious stories of old women turning themselves into hares, and of some who were pursued by huntsmen and hounds and were caught almost in the very act of returning to their own shape. And after regaining the old-woman shape the wounds inflicted by the hounds were still on the corresponding parts of their bodies, raw and bleeding, as in the case of the man-wolves above mentioned.”

However there are exceptions to the purely supernatural. For example, around about 900 A.D the Irish writer of *The Annals of the Four Masters* (dating from between 2242 after the year of creation and 1616 A.D) reports an animal like a *Kentrosaurus* or *Stegosaurus*: It was a large beast with “iron” nails on its tail which pointed backwards. Its head was shaped a little bit like a horse’s and it had thick legs with strong claws (Taylor 1989).

CROCODILE

Lough Mask was said to be the haunt of a crocodile, as mentioned by Roderick O’Flaherty in his *A Description of West or hlar*

Connaught (1684) and cited in *The Mystery Animals of Ireland* by Gary Cunningham and Ronan Coghlan (2010):

“There is one rarity more which we call the Irish Crocodile whereof one as yet living about ten years ago [in 1674] had sad experience. The man was passing the shore just by the waterside and spied far off the head a beast swimming, which he took to be an otter and took no more notice of it, but the beast it seems lifted up its head to discern whereabouts the man then was, then diving swam under the water till he struck ground, whereupon he ran out of the water suddenly and took the man by the elbow whereby the man stooped down and the beast fastened his teeth in his pate and dragged him into the water, where the man took hold of a stone by chance in his way and calling to mind the knife he had in his jacket, took it out and gave a thrust of it into the beast which thereupon got away from him into the lake. The water about him was all bloody, whether from the beast’s blood or his own or both he knows not. It was the pitch [colour] of an ordinary greyhound, of a black shiny skin without hair as he imagines. Old men acquainted with the lake do tell there is such a beast in it and that a stout fellow with a wolf dog along with him met the like there once, which after long struggling went away, in spite of the man and his dog and was long time after found rotten in a rocky cave of the lake when the waters decreased. The like they say is found in other lakes in Ireland, they call it Dovarchu, i.e. water dog or anchu which is the same.”

To which Cunningham and Coghlan (2010) add: “This animal is unlike the commonplace Irish otter, for although it initially looked like one, it evidently wasn’t.”

STRANGE WEXFORD ANIMAL

Irish Press, August 17, 1933

An animal, said to resemble a young crocodile, was discovered in a heap of debris in a garden at the back of Dr. Cantwell’s residence, Main Street, Bunclody, Co. Wexford, and has been forwarded to the Dublin Zoological Gardens.

Forty-two years later another crocodile-type animal turned up off Co. Wexford: “Hook Head is one of the two capes at the south end of the Barrow estuary in Co Wexford. Here, in 1975, a monster resembling a lizard, about 20’ long, was seen by fishermen” (Cunningham and Coghlan 2010).

MYSTERY BOAR-LIKE CREATURE

In *Walker’s Hibernian Magazine* for February 1781 an illustration of a wild boar or auroch-like animal appeared. (Officially, the last auroch died in Europe in 1627 in Poland.) In fact, several of these animals were found in late 1780 or early 1781 near Thomastown on the road between Tipperary and Cashel (see Muirhead 1997).

The text makes it clear the animals were tame: “This animal followed him at a slow pace near a mile. . . .” But this doesn’t indicate what species it actually was. What makes the case interesting is that the animal, although boar-like, is somewhat anomalous. The account tells how one John Carrol was travelling towards Cashel from Tipperary when he heard what sounded like the roar of a bull amongst some trees. After a few moments he saw the animal whose noise he had heard; its size and figure was that of an ordinary pig, but its head was armoured with spreading horns. This animal followed him at a slow pace near a mile until coming to a place near Thomastown Pool, where it entered a cave. The following night Mr. Carrol and some other men went to the cave and found three animals, which they took home (Muirhead 1997). This is the substance of the story.

These animals sound superficially like wild boar. The trouble is, what about those horns? Wild boar have tusks, not horns. According to Thompson, a naturalist of 19th century Ireland, writing in *Natural History of Ireland*, the tusks of Irish wild boar were of goodly dimensions. But Dr. Scouler, in 1833, said that compared with wild boar found in Scandinavian peat bogs, the Irish boar was very diminutive and was plentiful down to the 17th century, though the exact date of extinction is unknown (Harting 1972). If the Irish



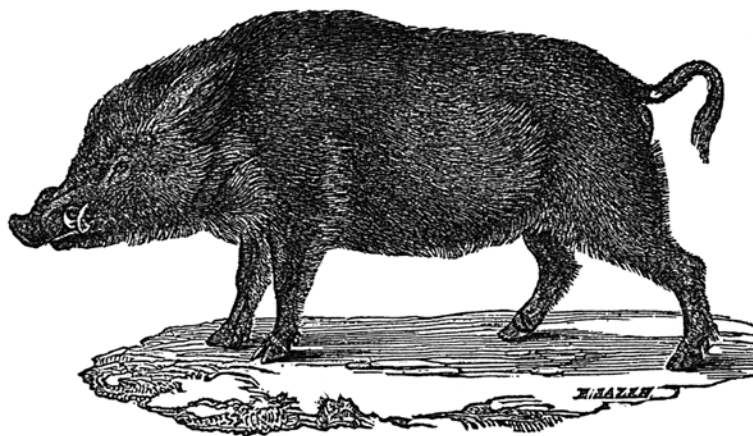
wild boar were really diminutive, would it have had prominent tusks? Unless it was some kind of deformity?

As far as aurochs are concerned, according to noted mammalogist Dr. Derek Yalden (pers. comm., Oct. 16, 1998): “All the evidence is that the Aurochs, like Roe Deer, never ever reached Ireland, so the question of when it died out does not arise. In the extensive *Paleontographical Society Monograph* on them (Reynolds 1939) there are 30 records from Scotland and 93 from England and Wales, but none from Ireland. Bison never ever made it either, so misidentification is not a factor. (There are plenty of records of both Reindeer and Irish Elk, even a few Woolly Mammoths, so absence of collectors is not an excuse.) Aurochsen were forest animals, and the habitat was not in place before the land-bridge was severed by rising sea-levels.”

Yalden later replied to me (pers. comm., Nov. 4, 1998), seemingly a bit exasperated: “I’ve no idea what the animal is, or was! The illustration clearly matches the description, the size and figure was that of an ordinary pig. It shows a pig’s snout, tusks,

cloven hooves, and curled tail. I think it is meant to be a sow with teats.” This followed his previously noting (pers. comm., Oct. 16, 1998), “Wild Boar are believed to have been long extinct in Ireland (perhaps in the Neolithic). They didn’t of course have horns. Someone, I suspect, was playing tricks. The Aurochs was a big animal, buffalo/bison-sized, and would never have been described as ‘the size and figure of an ordinary pig.’ I can’t imagine three Aurochsen going in a cave, or tamely being ‘brought home’ either (quite apart from the fact that the aurochs never got to Ireland). My guess is that someone stuck some bull’s horns on a pig.”

British cryptozoologist Max Blake (pers. comm., Feb. 15, 2010) commented: “The Irish beasts sound to me to be most likely misidentified wild boar, the huge tusks on some males could have been mistaken for horns or similar appendages.” Irish mystery animal researcher Ronan Coghlan (pers. comm., July 4, 2011) commented: “It looks like a European bison, wisent or zubr (all the same thing). . . . Nothing like this has ever been reported in Ireland.” Later Coghlan (pers. comm., July 6, 2011) said: “The wisent, also known as the zubr, is the European species of bison. It is now small in numbers and is mainly found in Poland, but I think there may be some on an estate in England. I have seen a stuffed specimen at the Natural History Museum in Dublin and it looks not unlike your mysterious beast.”



According to J.E. Harting, in his book *British Extinct Animals Within Historic Times* (1972), “the wild boar (*S. scrofa*) was common in Ireland until at least the 17th Century, although it is not certain at what stage it became extinct.” The image here is from J.E. Harting’s book.

THE IRISH WILD CAT

The Irish Wild Cat is another controversial animal which according to orthodoxy does not, nor ever has existed in Ireland. To quote from Cunningham (2008) again: “There is . . . an Irish cryptid—known from native testimony and folklore but still awaiting zoological acceptance—which once attracted the notice of some of Ireland’s most prominent 19th-century naturalists: the Irish wildcat. Ireland, unlike mainland Britain, has never been home to the European Wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*) in either its prehistoric or modern form, despite the island’s geographical proximity to Britain, the existence of land bridges when sea levels were much lower, and its ecological suitability to support such creatures. Yet despite the orthodox zoological view that there are no genuine Irish wildcats, there is a surprisingly substantial amount of anecdotal, and perhaps archæological, evidence to suggest that an aggressive feline predator has been indigenous for quite some time. . . . In Michael Vinney’s authoritative work on the natural and geological history of the country, simply entitled *Ireland* on p.58 he . . . includes a possible reason for the wildcat’s presence, noting: otter, pine marten, red fox, red squirrel—even the wildcat—are all candidates for early introduction to Ireland for their skins.”

Dr. Karl Shuker in *Mystery Cats of the World* (1989) said in relation to the observations of the naturalist Thompson: “Thompson had taken a particular interest in reports of alleged wildcat sightings in Ireland, notably in mountains of Erris in the county of Mayo. He had himself seen a very large cat, weighing 10lb 9oz/ 4.75kg which had been shot in the wild at Shane’s County Antrim. Apparently this specimen resembled the European wildcat in every way except for its tail (which was not bushy at its tip) and its fur



(which was of a finer texture). . . . In or around 1883, whilst shooting rabbits near County Galway's Annaghdown, F.C. Wallace sighted an animal which in his opinion seemed to be a magnificent specimen of a bona fide wild cat, but as no physical evidence was obtained, no formal identification could be made."

In W.H Maxell's *Wild Sports of the West* (1833) there is an account of the Irish wild cat, as follows: "Having put a terrier in, his suspicions were confirmed, as the dog came out severely torn, and, assisted by a shepherd-boy, he laid rabbit-nets round the den, commenced digging, and, before he had proceeded far, a cat of immense size bolted. She was breaking through the rabbit-net, when the chasseur, with more gallantry than prudence, seized her by the neck. The fierce animal instantly attacked him in turn, and, fastening upon his hands with teeth and talons, held her desperate grasp until the boy, with the edge of a spade, broke her back. They brought the dead beast along with them; it was of a dirty grey colour, double the size of the common house-cat, and its teeth and claws more than proportionately larger."

Hamilton (1896) provides the sceptics opinion, citing Sir J.W. Wilde: “Sir J.W. Wilde writes:— ‘I have known a great number of Cats in my time—gentle, tame, spiteful, venomous, vicious, cruel, clean, dirty, honest, stealing, &c.; but I never saw a Wild Cat, certainly not in the west of Ireland; all Cats I saw there were evidently tame ones that had got into the rocks and become wild.’

“In another letter he says:— ‘Mr. La Touche has asked me to communicate with you respecting the existence of the Wild Cat in Ireland. I never met with such an animal, although, both as a sportsman and somewhat of a naturalist, I have had ample opportunities for observation. There is no purely Irish name for Cat, for the word Catt, or, as it is pronounced, Catta, is a more corruption of English term. In the “Proceedings” of the Royal Irish Academy for 1860 you will find a lengthened essay of mine upon the unmanufactured animal remains then belonging to that institution; it contains much curious information on the ancient animals of Ireland. That the Domestic Cat has occasionally strayed from home and gone wild is quite true; and instances of the kind occurred in my place in Connemara some years ago, where in a cave by the lakeside a Cat brought up her young, and, frightened by the dogs, would never come near the house again. The only ancient reference which I can now lay hands on is that of the ancient Irish poem treated of in the tract already referred to, where it is said two Cats were procured from the cave of Ratticrohan, in county Roscommon, but I see no reason for believing that they were originally wild. The word used in the original MSS. is *Chait*, but is evidently a corruption of the English term.’”

Interestingly the Irish wild cat is supposed to have a spike or nail on the end of its tail, as noted by Cunningham (2008): “Which has been variously labelled a spike, claw or nail. Within T.J. Westropp’s *Folklore of Clare* there is a brief mention of a wildcat. In the chapter ‘Animal and Plant Superstitions’ p. 62, is the reference:

The wildcat is believed to have a spike on the end of its tail which it can stick into a pursuer, but I found no such fine legend in Clare on this point as I

did near Kerry in Limerick, where the cats pursued
and anchored themselves onto a farmer and his dog,
after chasing them from Clorane to Old Kidimo.

“Whilst researching sightings of animals in Ireland’s lakes, I corresponded with a man from one of the most isolated and, it must be said, most beautiful regions in Ireland. The Mullet in north-west Co Mayo looks similar to a peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic like an arthritic finger, but it is technically an island, means that it is Ireland’s second largest offshore island after Achill. Pap Murphy is a truly fascinating man in a country full of great characters and fascinating men, yet his knowledge of Co Mayo is humbling. From archaeology to history to folklore, anybody researching this region of Ireland should definitely visit him or his visit will be a complete waste of time.

“Pap had often heard of the wildcat, and when questioned told me of an incident which happened around 1940 or 1950. Pap’s uncle and father encountered a wildcat in a shed at the end of Pap’s uncle’s house. According to Pap, the animal was entangled in some fishing nets and debris. It was subsequently killed. The cat was quite large and had growled at both men. The two men also told of the animal’s possessing a nail at the end of its tail. When questioned about this very curious physical feature. Pap was adamant it was very sharp and possibly bony—it was not an illusion created with the tail hairs’ ending in a poisoned tip, as I cautiously suggested.”

There follows below a selection of newspaper and journal reports from Ireland on the wild cat arranged alphabetically by county and chronologically based on my research in 2010 (Muirhead 2010). The articles are arranged in date order of sightings, irrespective of publication date. As can be seen many of the reports are from the South-West and West of Ireland.

Irish Republic
CO. CLARE:

FOXES AND BADGERS

Nenagh Guardian, December 17, 1838

For some time past war has been declared on foxes by the farming community in this area, and though the season of peace and good-will is at hand, there are no signs of a truce yet. During the past week a local sportsman shot four foxes, two badgers and a wild cat almost as big as a young sheep in the Ogonnelloe district.

CO. CORK:

SUPPOSED OCCURRENCE OF A WILD CAT IN THE WEST OF CORK

Irish Naturalist, Vol. 17, no. 7, July 1908

A species of Wild Cat is proved by its fossil remains to have inhabited Ireland at no very remote period, as Dr Scharff has shown in his very careful paper (*Proc. R.I. Academy*, January 1906), and he also urged that enquiries should be made as to whether such an animal has been seen or heard of lately (*Irish Naturalist*, 1905, p.79). Though the specimen referred to below has unfortunately perished, and conclusive proof of its species is therefore unattainable, it may be well to record the remarkable descriptions given me by several members of the Becher family.

In 1881 I made a note of the statement of Mr E.W. Becher and his sister to the effect that some years previously their elder brother shot a Wild Cat at Liss Ard, the O'Donovan's place. "It had a broad head, short legs, bristly tail; the colour was brindled, with bars of black on a dark grey, with a dash of colour."

I have recently met their elder brother, the Rev H. Belcher, who at my request has written the following account:—"Castlehaven Rectory, Skibbereen, May 8th, 1898.

"I shot what I took to be a Wild Cat at Liss Ard, Skibbereen, during the winter of 1873-74, probably in January 1874. The place was high, rocky ground, on the skirt of a

young plantation. I just got a glimpse of it passing through the gorse and brambles and thought it might be a Marten Cat. We were beating for Woodcocks. The retriever fetched it, and when she came out of the covert the Cat had her by the nose."

Southern Star, February 11, 1893

This extract was a summary of a lecture on Irish natural history by the Rev. H. Burton Deane at Clonakilty in Co. Cork. In it he says: "Rosscarberry is a capital place for otters, foxes, stoats, weasels, wild cat and others of the furry tribe."

Southern Star, July 19, 1902

Here is wonderful exemplification of the queer effects which sunstroke has on some timorous minded people: "Dear Sir, permit me, through the medium of your Macroom Notes to put before the public of Macroom and district a danger which menaces thousands of human lives. There is at present in Coolcower wood a wild cat of the most blood-thirsty description which I saw with my own two eyes on Thursday evening last. This may sound like a hoax, but I pledge you my honour I am perfectly earnest. I knew the animal as soon as I caught a glimpse of him, crouching as I believed, for a spring upon me. It was at least four feet long with great glaring eyes and a bushy tail about two foot in length with a nail in the end of it. I did not wait for further observations at the time but I can assure you it was a wild cat." Yours truly Pro Bono Publico.

CO. KERRY:

The Freeman's Journal, September 2, 1923

When the cat appears in place-names, it is not the domestic cat that is meant, but the wild cat which was at one

time common in Ireland, and was certainly not extinct fifty years ago, for I know a man that used to trap them in a wood at the foot of Corran Tuathail, Co Kerry. This wild cat was a fierce brute, called Cat-Crainn, tree-cat, and occasionally Mada-Crainn, tree-dog, the latter being also the Irish name of the squirrel.

CO. LIMERICK:

The Freemans Journal, August 24th 1838

Mr Cahitl (?) of Whiskey-hall, county Limerick, shot, on Thursday last, at Cragg-wood, three wild cats of monstrous size. These strange animals attacked the wood ranger a few days ago, who narrowly escaped with his life. So disfigured were his features, and so completely exhausted was he, that his family did not for a considerable time recognise him on being brought home. Mr Cahitl has taken the skins to send to the Royal Cork Institute.

A large all-white cat was reported on September 9, 1944, in the *Anglo-Celt*, which killed kittens, birds and small dogs.

IRISH SNAKES

Contrary to the persistent legend that British missionary and former slave St. Patrick drove out all the snakes from Ireland during his ministry in the 5th century A.D., these reptiles have turned up in various locations in Ireland since at least the early nineteenth century onwards, as the following examples will show. Indeed so widespread is the occurrence of snakes both chronologically and geographically that it is hard to believe that Ireland has been or is now totally devoid of snakes.

Here are some of the records:

Irish Republic

CO. CARLOW:

SNAKES IN IRELAND.

Irish Independent, August 18, 1909

A few days ago a postman named Sinnott, while cycling near Bagenalstown Co Carlow, killed a snake on the roadside. The skin was a greenish colour, with dark spots, the reptile measuring twenty-seven inches in length.

CO. CORK:

A STRAY SNAKE NEAR CORK.

The Irish Naturalist, Vol. 5, no. 1, January 1896

A recent issue of the Cork *Constitution* records the occurrence of a snake near Blarney. The reptile was encountered crossing a grass field and is said to have been at first mistaken for an eel! It was promptly knocked on the head, a fate which meets all the members of its order, which purposely or accidentally are let loose in Ireland.

CO. DUBLIN:

FOUND A HOME IN DUBLIN.

Irish Independent, May 29, 1905

The Dublin "Evening Mail" states that a snake was discovered in the office of that paper on Saturday morning. According to the "Mail" paragraph, the reptile was about 18 inches long and "by its markings seemed to belong to the order of common English grass snakes."

SNAKE FOUND IN IRELAND.

Irish Independent, July 9, 1906

A terrified mother, her slumbering baby, and a three-feet long snake gave rise to a sensational incident at

Ranelagh, in the suburbs of Dublin, the other day. The persistent barking of a dog attracted the mother's attention to the viper, which was wriggling its way towards the perambulator in which the baby slept. She immediately called for assistance, and after an exciting chase the intruder was captured. It is at present a prisoner at the Zoo, where its scope for wandering is prematurely closed.

GARDEN SNAKES.

Irish Independent, July 9, 1906

Something like a mild sensation was created in Ranelagh when a snake was discovered in a garden in that historic locality. But there is hardly any necessity for alarm, nor would the presence of an odd snake or two in Ireland tend to upset the tradition of their banishment by St Patrick. One swallow does not make a summer, nor would the discovery of half a dozen snakes in Ireland prove that the reptile is indigenous of this country. The snakes might easily have got into Ireland with some foreign cargo. Quite recently a live snake fully the size of the one caught in Ranelagh was found in Liverpool Docks coiled round a bundle of bananas. But it is no novelty in England, where both the harmless wood snake and the venomous adder are common enough. It is pretty certain that for many centuries, at least, Ireland has enjoyed an immunity in this respect, and there is no reason for believing that we shall not continue to be free these reptiles in the future.

AN EPIDEMIC OF SNAKES.

Irish Independent, July 13, 1906

Sir—As there seems to be an epidemic of snakes in and around Dublin at present, it may be of interest to know that when passing along Marlborough street about a fortnight ago in the forenoon I saw a small snake being killed by some boys on the steps of the Abbey Theatre. As far as I could gather it had come down the lane opposite. In length it was about two feet, and it was of a dark brown colour, but did

not appear to have any ring around its neck. A seafaring man who was passing at the time described it as a “grass snake”. Can any reader suggest a likely explanation for this sudden rush of undesirable aliens?

Carraig Dhonn, Dalkey,
S.O. Huadhaigh.
July 10, 1906

OPINIONS OF READERS

SNAKES IN IRELAND

Irish Independent, July 16, 1906

Sir—Under the above heading there appeared a letter from a Dalkey correspondent stating that he witnessed a snake being killed in Abbey street by some boys. Your correspondent is somewhat uneasy by the appearance of these aliens. Judging from the tone of his letter I am inclined to think that he is anxious for the entire destruction of these reptiles.

I hope that none of your millions of readers will consider me pulling the “long bow” when I say that the County Dublin is infested with snakes. While rabbiting through Coolock on Sunday, 8th inst., I went as the crow flies on to Feltrim and back to Artano through Mr Andrew J. Kettle’s farm, where I came across (adjacent to the convent or convalescent home) four snakes. I was somewhat alarmed and called the attention of Michael Flanagan to their presence of what then appeared to be cranes or herons with their necks erect in the air. Acting on the advice of Flanagan, I fired at and killed with my gun one of the most prominent of the number in a semi-mown field, and to mine and Flanagan’s amazement there was no less than a dozen of these reptiles who raised their heads in various directions and filled the air with a hissing noise, and disappeared into a corn field about a hundred yards from the scene after which myself and Flanagan examined the victim of a full charge of No. 4 shot, who died evidently without a struggle,

as it lay at full length minus the head, which was decapitated.

On July 11th myself and Michael Hanraghan of Ormond quay, went in through Marino gate with the intention of viewing the intention of viewing the novitiate. The pathway from this gate to Puckstown is about two miles. On the way to Puckstown through Marino grounds we saw six of these reptiles, two opposite Lord Charlemont's House, and four between the latter and the novitiate. One hundred yards from the "Thatch" on the same date were two boys with dogs in search of a "snake" which they succeeded in dispatching.

John O'Hehir
Merville House, Clontarf,
July 13, 1906

Irish Independent, July 17, 1906

Sir—I beg to state that my foreman captured a large snake in my cellar the other day. The reptile was coiled up in a dusty corner, and we managed, after some difficulty, to get it into a sack. I have the snake in a glass case in my window, where he can be seen by passers-by. I mean to keep it as a curiosity, and we have given it the name of "Dusty."

James Quinn
2 Main Street, Blackrock

WARNING THAT STRAY SNAKES CAN LEAVE SOME PEOPLE RATTLED

The Irish Times, July 22, 2006

The Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA) is seeking new homes for 10 stray pets of the slithering kind. Some 1,500 years after snakes were supposed to have been banished from Ireland, the society is experiencing an upsurge in the number of stray reptiles turning up in unwelcome places. . . . In recent weeks the society rescued 10 snakes in the Dublin area, varying in size from 12cm (5in) to 2m (6.6ft).

Co. GALWAY:

Sometimes a “snake” is not what it seems to be:

A SNAKE IN GALWAY

MINIATURE REPTILE IN TOMATO BASKET.

Connacht Sentinel, August 8, 1933

There was great interest amongst Galway people on Saturday morning as the result of what was thought to be a snake being found by Mr Peter Lynch, Courthouse-avenue, in a basket of tomatoes brought from the shop by his little daughter.

The reptile was about 3½ inches in length, of a blackish colour, with little yellow spots across the back. It had a large head and eyes resembling a snake and a small fin over its tail. It had also two incisors and was somewhat like the common newt in general appearance. Mr Lynch sent his find to Mr. Higgins, Assistant Professor of Natural History, University College, Galway, who identified it as a foreign species of caterpillar and sent it to the National Museum, Dublin.

Co. KERRY:

SNAKES AND ADDERS

Kerryman, March 14, 1953

Lord Castlerosse was showing a party of American millionaires over the famous Killarney golf links, which was his pride and joy. “See” he exclaimed, throwing his arms wide towards the spacious prospect of lake and fell. “It has wider fairways, better natural hazards and more beautiful vistas than the best of your links in the United States.” “Waall”, said Whitney magnanimously, “I guess you’re about right. You made a good job of it, but you got to give Saint Patrick credit for banishing the snakes outa the

country before you began to build your links. No fear of treading on a rattler or a copperhead in the rough like we have. . . ." Suddenly as we approached Raspe's old copper mines near Doulough, the Dean shouted "Did you see him?" and ran his bike off the pathway into the grass. He jumped off, threw the bike aside and clamped his foot firmly on something that squirmed viciously in the grass.

"It's a snake" he exclaimed, when I got close enough to look down at his capture. Sure enough it had all the characteristics we associate with the pictures of snakes we had seen in books—eel-like body, camouflage colouring, coarse skin and baleful, unblinking eyes. He was very much alive and we were very much aware of dangerous possibilities. But we succeeded in covering him with my cap and wrapping him up in handkerchiefs to take him home. On the way back we discussed various ways of keeping him alive to prove that we had really caught a snake in dear old Ireland.

ARMAGH VISITORS DISCOVER SNAKE IN TRALEE HOUSE

Kerryman, September 2, 1994

It may be now the case that St Patrick did not chase all the snakes out of Ireland—well, not out of Tralee, anyway. An 18 inch-long non-poisonous garter snake was discovered by a family from Armagh while they were staying in a rented house in Ballymullen for the duration of the Rose of Tralee. The black snake, with yellow stripes, was spotted under the stairs before the family chased it out of the house into the garden. They contacted the Gardai in Tralee and Ballmullen army barracks. Garda Martin Tierney, from Tralee Garda station, took the call and assisted the family in forcing the snake into a lunchbox with a rake. . . . The garter snake was removed to Tralee Garda station and from there to Toby Hodd, Muckcross, Killarney because of his knowledge of boa constrictor and used to keep two garter snakes. . . .

SEARCH FOR ELUSIVE SNAKE COMES TO A HAPPY CONCLUSION

Kerryman, May 12, 2000

A five day search for an elusive snake in Killarney ended successfully late on Sunday evening with the capture of a reptile over one metre long outside a garage. Not so much then 'A snake came to my water trough', as in old Inter cert D H Lawrence poem, as a snake came to my oil depot. The black and white snake was spotted by residents and business owners in Barrys Lane on Wednesday evening when it appeared in a toilet in the area. National Park Rangers were called to investigate and terrified residents were asked to keep a watchful eye for the creature. Barrys Lane garage owner Noel O' Sullivan, where the snake appeared a number of times said: "We were all afraid. Nobody knew how dangerous it was." The snake was thought to be a garter snake but he was later identified as an equally harmless king snake. National Park Ranger suspect he may be an escaped pet which went into hibernation in the garage. . . . Happy the snake, who was secured in a canvass bag, was to be handed over to the Kerry branch of the RSPCA.

DEADLY HORN-NOSED VIPER FOUND IN CO. KERRY

The Irish Times, August 26, 2006

A nine-inch snake described as "highly dangerous" by the Kerry branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) has been found in a box of house tiles imported from Greece. The discovery was made on Thursday by workers at a building site in Ballyduff, Co. Kerry. The snake, a horn-nosed viper, is highly poisonous and its venom can kill within two hours.

CO. TIPPERARY:

SNAKES IN IRELAND

The Freeman's Journal, May 27, 1837

Sunday morning, a grass snake, two feet and a half long,

was taken in Coolnamuck wood, the estate of Charles William Wall, Esq., within three miles of Carrick-on-Suir, by a countryman. It is now to be seen in the shop of a medical gentleman in Carrick.—*Waterford Chronicle*.

CO. WEXFORD:

SNAKE FROM CO. WEXFORD

Irish Independent, November 15, 1920

A grass snake found in Co. Wexford has been placed in the Dublin Zoo.

CO. WICKLOW:

AN OLD RECORD FOR AN IRISH SNAKE

The Irish Naturalists' Journal, vol. 8, no. 9, January 1946

The dilapidated remains of a snake bearing the following inscription has recently been acquired by the National Museum. The inscription, which is on the back of a visiting card of "Lord Walter Fitzgerald, Kilkea Castle" [Co. Kildare], reads as follows:— "An Adder killed by John Ryan, of Castledermot, on the public road at Ballynure Church, Co. Wicklow, on 4th September, 1903. Length 3 feet." Needless to say, the specimen is a Grass Snake and not an Adder. No doubt it was somebody's pet which had escaped from captivity or had been introduced with merchandise.

National Museum, Dublin, 23.1.1946 A.W. Stelfox

Northern Ireland

CO. ANTRIM:

Countryside-Monthly, September 1, 1906

A 2 foot long grass snake was reported to have been killed in Ballymena

CO. ARMAGH:

AN INVASION ON THE BOYNE

Irish Independent, July 19, 1906

Sir—Perhaps it will interest your readers north of the Boyne to learn that the snake invasion seems to have, like William of old, crossed that historic river. Whilst I was yesterday having a walk round my farm adjoining the Warrenpoint road with a friend of mine, Mr Patrick Marren, U.C. of this town, I came on a fine specimen of the snake family, I came on a fine specimen of the snake family under a small hawthorn bush which is growing in my field. We approached the visitor carefully, but he was more agile than we, and after a most exciting chase got out of our reach into the ditch, my friend having performed several acrobatic feats in a vain endeavour to throw his coat over the snake. We had over opportunity of examining him carefully, and he seemed to be about 4 feet long with a white spot on the back of the head, and his body was of a dark brown colour. I regret very much I had no means of despatching the trespasser, as he would undoubtedly be a curio in the district, he being the only specimen I have ever heard of having been seen around here.

Theobald Hanna.

“The Oaks” Chapel street, Newry

July 18, 1906

CO. DOWN:

SNAKES

Animals and Men 14, 1997

Contrary to popular opinion snakes have turned up in Ireland, most probably introduced deliberately or by accident. In 1831 a Mr James Cleland introduced six grass snakes to Rath-gael in Co. Down from Covent Garden to see if they would survive. One snake was killed at Milecross

about three miles distant, and it was thought at first to be a kind of eel until a naturalist identified it as a snake.

“One far seeing clergyman preached a sermon in which he cited this unfortunate snake as token of the immediate commencement of the millennium.” (Chambers, 1883)

Three more snakes were later killed, which left two still in the wild. The *Times* of Sept 8th 1832 reported, reprinting from a Belfast newspaper, that “a gentleman called at our office last night with a female snake 3ft 3 inches (1 m) in length, which was killed yesterday in a field at Milecross. . . . They (grass snakes) have recently been seen in the Co. of Down. The futility of the popular belief that snakes cannot live in our blessed land has been most fully demonstrated—several large eggs having been found in its ovarium.” (Muirhead 1997) Their presence in Ireland was attributed by some to opposition to the Reform Bill of 1832.

CO. LONDONDERRY:

A STRAY SNAKE NEAR COLERAINE

Irish Naturalist, vol. 5, June 1896

On the evening of April 22nd, a lady friend called to tell me that she had killed a snake in her garden, which is in the immediate vicinity of Coleraine. It is on the right bank of the river Bann, and about a quarter of a mile south of the town. She described the reptile's hiss and her own alarm in such a graphic way, that in spite of the legend about our Patron Saint and his expatriation of all Ophidians, the incredulity with which I first regarded her story gave way, and I accompanied her to the spot and found upon a grass plot in front of her house the newly-killed snake. It is a Ringed Snake (*Tropidontus natrix*) measuring twenty five and three quarter inches in length. In depriving it of its supposed power to harm she had not used it gently. Nevertheless, though somewhat mutilated, the specimen was well worth preserving, and so I committed it to a bottle of spirits.

It is not necessary to say that Ringed Snakes are not native here, but where this one came from, or how it came here, I have been as yet unable to make out.

James Bellas

Cronbannagh, Coleraine.

Co. Tyrone:

A SNAKE MYSTERY

Irish Independent, May 20, 1918

A 10 inch snake was found in a hothouse at Omagh Rectory. It is not known how it got there.

WORMS AND FROGS

The slow-worm (a lizard) has become established in Ireland. “It is not supposed to be part of the Irish fauna, but there is now evidence of an introduction by humans in the west. Rumour has it they were introduced in about 1960” (Cunningham and Coghlan 2010). In recent years they have been seen in the Burren region of Co. Clare (Anon 2006).

Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) was a collector of folklore who lived in Sligo. She collected stories of giant worms—one was 8 foot long and attacked a woman near Clough.

“It was once believed that the frog was not indigenous to Ireland. Giraldus says it was not to be found there and the appearance of one in the 12th century caused King Donal of Ossory to prognosticate gloomily. But there must always have been a small number as DNA research at the University of London has shown that the DNA of Irish frogs is different from their British counterparts. This means that the frog population of Ireland that existed before the Ice Age cannot have died out completely, but must have found a warm niche somewhere in that wintry spell, emerging when the good weather returned. Foreign frogs were introduced to the Dublin area about the 18th Century and the two breeds would have mixed” (Cunningham and Coghlan 2010).

WATER PIG

In 1998 or 1999 I was told a story of a “water pig” which was seen in a “narrow swampy river that runs into the sea in the west of Ireland.” It was described as being black and the size of a small dog. This had occurred in the late 1960s. Perhaps it was a juvenile seal? In April 2008, an animal that looked like a walrus was seen by a woman in Termon, Co. Mayo, when she opened her cowshed. A similar animal was seen in May 1962 in Lough Dubh by Alphon-sus Mullaney and his son.

BEAR

There have been occasional bear scares in Ireland, such as in 1886, 1895 and 1926. These scares seem to have been known as “Newry Bear” scares after the town in what is now N. Ireland, rather like the “Surry puma” became a kind of generic term in Britain in the 1960s. Consider these examples:

THE NEWRY BEAR AGAIN

The Freeman's Journal, August 8, 1886

As Guard Maxwell was taking a train into Madden Station at 11 o'clock he observed the form of a large animal in a corn field adjoining. Scarcely waiting the stoppage of the train he rushed from the van, seized a rope and a pole, called assistance, and made for the field. After a desperate struggle he secured the brute, which proved to be a brown bear of the Asiatic variety. It is supposed his capture is the famous Newry bear, whose movements were so fully reported a year ago, and his attention is to present it to the Dublin Zoo. The reappearance of Bruno in the neighbourhood was reported some days ago, but till now was regarded as a hoax.

THE NEWRY BEAR

The Freeman's Journal, August 14, 1886

We have received a communication purporting to come from Mr D. Maxwell, denying that he was instrumental in catching a bear at Madden Station as reported in our issue

of the 8th, and giving many particulars regarding the natural history of the aforesaid bear and its present habitation.

Jumping forward to 1895:

THE NEWRY BEAR STILL AT LARGE

INDIVIDUALS ATTACKED

PROPERTY DESTROYED

The Freeman's Journal, February 25, 1895

Unfortunately the latest intelligence that can be imparted regarding the bear prowling about Newry is that he is still uncaptured. It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the damage that the dreaded beast is committing, and the inhabitants of the district are afraid to venture outside their homes after dusk for fear of encountering him. On Friday night he was observed in the vicinity of Camlough, county Armagh, and was pursued by several of the residents of the district. His footprints were traced to the Lake, in close proximity to which Bruin was sheltered from observation. A shot was fired by one of the pursuers, and scarcely had the report died away when the "grisly" darted from his hiding place, crossed the Lake—almost entirely frozen and a distance of about half a mile—and escaped. . . . Up till now the peregrinations of the beast were confined to a radius far out in the rural district, but its intrusions into the borders of a populous town was regarded with alarm. Search parties were constituted, and proceeded in pursuit of bruin. These included Sergeant Durnan, Sergeant Kilcourse, Newry; Sergeant Keane, Camlough; Constables Campbell, M'Connell, Gilmore, Fitzpatrick, Phillips, Sheridan, Reilly, M'Cusker, Mr Richard Doherty, and many others, who divided themselves into groups, and went in different directions tracing the marks of the brute, which were identified as the indents of a bear. They made a minute search of the townlands of Tullyhappy, Clonduff, Searse, Knockduff, Crobane, Shinn, &c but at no time did they come

in sight of the troublesome one, and a second day's investigations had no results.

THE NEWRY BEAR
PROPOSED HUNTING EXPEDITION
EXCITING SEARCH NEAR ARMAGH
The Freeman's Journal, February 26, 1895

No further tidings regarding the movements of Bruin have been communicated to the police authorities, and though a vigilant search is still being made, he has succeeded in evading observation and detection. In hunting circles the bear has excited the greatest interest, and several gentlemen of a sportive disposition have explored and are exploring the surrounding hills endeavouring to capture him. To-day the District Inspector in command of the Newry district, received a communication from the officers of the Hussars at Newbridge, stating that if the bear was still prowling about the town they would arrange for a hunting expedition. The District Inspector, of course, could give no definite information as to whether the bear was still located in this district or not, and so far arrangements are not completed.

The Freeman's Journal, February 28, 1895

The Newry bear has been pretty well hunted to death. He has become quite a newspaper feature. If the bull may be pardoned he has displaced the sea serpent as the lion of the season. . . . He is now, we are told roaming at large through the woods. Chorus—let him roam. The bear has got to be a bit of a bore. Terrible is the scepticism of the times. There are people who are beginning to think that the Newry bear has no real existence at all and that the tales of him are of a cock and bull description. There is a story in a Wild West novel of a wild beast show that is possibly in point. Two gentlemen dead broke, in fact answering accurately the Claimant's description of men with brain's but without

money, advertised a wild beast show. They had but one beast in stock, but it was a boomer, unique and furious. We forget precisely its name, but it was something awe-inspiring and tremendous. The Orinoco comes pretty close to it. The biggest hall in the town was hired to see this fiery, untamed animal go through his performance, of which eating hot iron was the most moderate item. Suddenly a terrible tumult was heard behind the stage, the trampling of feet, the clanking of chains, yells of beastly fury and cries of human terror, blended in a hurricane of sounds. Suddenly one of the showmen rushed on the stage deadly pale with fear (or flour), with clothes in tatters and blood streaming from face and arms. "Gentlemen" he cried, in a voice that quavered with emotion, "Save yourselves, save yourselves, save your wives and children. The Oronocko is at large." They left without waiting to have their money back.

THE NEWRY BEAR AGAIN
LUDICROUS INCIDENT IN A RAILWAY TUNNEL
The Freeman's Journal, March 6, 1895

Information of an amusing incident which occurred on Sunday has just come to light. Several men were returning home from repairing some telegraph wires, and chose their route through the railway tunnel at Lisscommon, a townland adjacent to Newry. Conversation turned to the bear and its depredations, many of which were alleged to have been perpetrated in that district. Two of the party were in advance, when suddenly a nameless something reared up and embraced one of the pioneers. "Help, help!" and "The bear, the bear!" reverberated through the tunnel, and the rearguard came up with a lantern, only to find that the nameless something was a large brown goat.

IS IT THE NEWRY BEAR?
CAPTURE IN CO. ROSCOMMON
The Freeman's Journal, March 29, 1895
Yesterday great excitement was occasioned in

Ballintubber by the announcement that the escaped Newry bear had been captured at Caran, about two miles from here. It appears that about 6.30 yesterday morning Thomas Snougue, the hand on the lands of Caran, was out on the farm when he spied a strange looking animal. He at once gave the alarm, and in a short time about ten men turned out and went in pursuit. After an exciting chase of an hour's duration they succeeded in capturing the brute. He is of a brown colour, and seems to be incapacitated from the treatment he received. There were many sheep and lambs missed off the surrounding farms previous to his capture. The people of the locality generally believe he must be the escaped Newry bear. The hand on the land (Thom. Snougue) brought the matter before the magistrates presiding at Ballintubber Petty Sessions today, when Capt M'Turnan, R.M ordered the R I C to visit the scene. The bruin is at present chained up in an outhouse on the land.

In 1926 there was a bear scare in Newbliss, Co. Monaghan, just inside the Irish Republic.

IS IT A BEAR?

ALARM AMONGST NEWBLISS RESIDENTS

The Anglo-Celt, April 10, 1926

It is being stated in Newbliss that on Saturday morning an animal like a bear was seen roaming before most people were astir in the village. A workman told our representative on another morning that his attention was directed to a number of dogs gathered round an animal which was entering the village from a road leading to the country. As the brute approached him he at once saw it was a bear and urged some dogs to attack it, but no form of inducement could induce them to try conclusions with bruin, and all of the dogs beat a hasty retreat. The bear then went in the direction of a slaughterhouse situated in the village. Other persons have since affirmed they saw the strange animal. It is stated that a small travelling menagerie, some time ago,

when in Coothill, lost a bear, and the assumption is that it is the same animal which is now prowling about in Newbliss district in the night time, keeping in hiding during the day.

According to the *Irish Independent* of April 30, 1926, the Newbliss “bear” was shot and found to be a badger, then put on exhibition. Bears have not been found in the wild in Ireland for about 3000 years.

DEFORMED MUSTELID?

In *The Naturalists' Notebook* for 1869 there appeared a story about an unknown mustelid-like animal (illustration here by Dr. Darren Naish.) The story originally featured in *Saunders's Newsletter*.



Capture of a Curious Animal in a Rabbit Snare—An animal which baffles the skill of those who have seen it to define, was a few days ago found in a snare set for rabbits in the demense of the Marquis of Conyngham, at Slane, County Meath.

It is thus described by the gamekeepers:—The size of a good cat, with a tail about a foot and a quarter [18 cm] in length, covered with a strong wiry hair. The snout is sharp and pointed, something like a weasel's (sic). In the mouth there are four large tusks, two pointing upwards and two pointing downwards. A small mane of dark brown hair runs down the whole length of the back; but the strangest thing of all is that it has twelve toes or claws on each foot, in two

rows—seven on the outside row, which are exceedingly sharp, and five on the inside, in general it is more stoutly built than animals of the cat kind. Still, the body is lithe and supple, the colour throughout is dark brown, and white on the breast.

A conversation with the current Marquis of Conyngham in July 1997 revealed that this was the first time he'd heard of the animal. Some family records had been destroyed in a fire but he had read about wild cats in Ireland "in the early 20th century."

PINE MARTENS "ATTACKING SHEEP"

This unheard of behaviour was recorded for posterity in the *Connacht Tribune*, March 14th, 1936.

STRANGE ANIMALS

I noticed in a recent issue of "The Connacht Tribune" that a defendant stated that the gun for which he had been summoned was kept by him for the purpose of shooting strange animals which were destroying his sheep. An inquiry in the locality which this defendant resides has satisfied me that the animals to which he referred are Pine Martens, a species of weasel almost extinct in Ireland today. These animals are much larger than squirrels and their skins are much prized by furriers.

In ancient times they were to be found in fairly large numbers on the Mourne Mountains and on the hilltops of County Wicklow but they have practically disappeared from those haunts today. They are still found on the Highlands of Scotland and in the forests of England. . . . For several years their existence was unknown in the West of Ireland but less than twelve months ago one of this species was captured in Augrane Wood, near Ballygar, by Mr Patrick Keane, Ballythomas, Creggs, an employee of the Department of Agriculture (Forestry Section). The capture of this rare animal received much publicity in the metropolitan and

provincial Press at the time and naturalists were much in the discovery of such an animal in Co. Galway. . . . Evidently there is a colony of these animals in the vicinity of Glenamaddy.

MARSUPIAL MOUSE?

KELLS SPORTSMAN'S STRANGE FIND

Meath Chronicle, September 18, 1915

Mr Gilbert Crosbie, the well known Kells sportsman, made a rare discovery in a wood at Maperath on Thursday morning. He came upon a weasel, which had a strange little animal in its clutches. He, however, got possession of the "freak", which was then dying, having been bitten on the head by the weasel. The "freak"—for it is nothing else—is a trifle larger than a young rat, has a brown back, white belly, thin legs, rabbit head, hare's ears, "scutty" tail, and a little pouch under the throat, somewhat after the style of the kangaroo. Mr Crosbie is sending the little hybrid to Dublin to have it stuffed.

DOG-FOX HYBRID?

STRANGE ANIMAL

Kerryman, May 13, 1983

An unusual animal—a cross between a dog and a fox was shot in Direen on Sunday week last by members of the Currow Gun Club who were on a vermin shoot at the time. The animal had the head and tail of a fox and dog-like body with coarse, thick hair.

UNKNOWN PIG-LIKE ANIMAL

APPEARANCE OF A STRANGE ANIMAL NEAR DERRYLAHAN.

Nenagh Guardian, February 16, 1898

A recent appearance at Derrylahan, Roscommon is a

strange animal the genus of which is a mystery to the country people and others who have visited the locality. The newcomer is described as as a quadruped resembling a pig in shape, but somewhat larger and furnished with a red shaggy coat. The extremities differ from those of a pig in being much more pointed while the feet resemble those of a sheep and the eyes are very prominent and high up in the head. The mysterious visitor has been in the locality for some weeks, and appears to have taken up permanent residence on the farm of Mr Benhold, of Derrylahan where it has excavated a huge burrow capable of admitting the body of a man. The animal divides its time between Derrylahan and (?)

Wood some distance away. And appears in no way disconcerted by the approach or proximity of human beings or any of the brute creation. A few days ago a gentleman whilst shooting, accompanied by two dogs, came suddenly on the strange animal lying in a clump of bushes. The dogs advanced but on approaching closely to the unexpected quarry became terrified and in spite of all calls and attempts to shock their flight ran home with great speed, and refused their food during the following day. The mysterious animal continues to roam the country unchecked.

ELK?

The *Killeshadra News* of March 20, 1954, tells of one James Leddy, who, when ploughing, found the remains of an animal with “elk-like horns”. This doesn’t tell us very much as many people have only a vague idea of what an elk is. In Europe the term is used for the moose, in America for the wapiti (Cunningham and Coghlan 2010).

COYPU

The *Roscommon Herald* of February 25, 1939, reported the story of a coypu:

STRANGE WILD ANIMALS

A man named Meneely was shooting wildfowl at Holyrood near Belfast when an animal the size of a collie but shorter in the legs came out of a clump of grass and attacked him. His gun was not loaded at the moment, and the beast got hold of him by the leg. If he had not been wearing sea-boots he would have been badly bitten. Finally, he killed the creature, but it was a long time before it was identified. It was a coypu, a South American rodent. How it got to Ireland is a mystery.

INSECTS

Ireland has from time to time been visited by unusual insects. In *The Natural History of Ireland* by Gerard Boate (1652) the following is to be found:

A Letter from Dr. Thomas Molyneaux, Fellow of the Royal Society, to the Right Reverend St. George, Lord Bishop of Clogher; concerning Swarms of Insects, that of late Years have much infested some Parts of the Province of Connaught in Ireland.

My Good Lord,

Ever since your lordship first spoke to me of the strange appearance of vast swarms of a sort of insects in this kingdom, that have lately much infested some parts of the province of *Connaught*, and the great ravage and devastation they have wrought in that country: I endeavour'd to inform my self the best I could concerning them; partly, I confess, from an inclination common to those of my profession, to make enquiries into things natural; but more especially from an earnest regard to gratify your lordship's expectations and desires, which I have always looked upon as commands, in whatever lies my power. . . . This last year, 1697, they have reached as far as the Shannon, and some of the scattered loose parties crost the river, and got into the

province of Leinster, but were met there by a stronger army of jackdaws, that did much execution among them, killing and devouring great numbers. Their main body still keeps in *Connaught*, and took up their last quarters at a well improve'd *English* plantation, not far from the river *Shannon*, call'd *Air's court*, where they found plenty of provision, and did a great deal of mischief by stripping the hedges, gardens, and groves of beech quite naked of all their leaves.

But the true locust, much resembling in shape a common grasshopper, though larger, is quite a different sort of insect from this, which belongs to that tribe call'd by the naturalists . . . the *Scarabeus* or beetle kind, that has strong thick cases to defend and cover their tender thin wings, that lie out of sight and next to the body.

BLOOD-SUCKING SPIDER

“The spider is of course no stranger to the Irish, but in Clare it was believed there was a special type—the Blood sucking spider. This could grow to the size of a piglet and it would attack children in the night” (Cunningham and Coghlan, 2010).

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